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## Africa's Strategic Role Weighed

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By John Beaufort

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"The prevailing tendency is to underrate the strategic importance of Africa," according to the Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS). But "any breach of the peace in Africa is likely to draw one or more of the great powers into its vortex."

An institute survey has appeared at a time when Congo developments and the Organization of African Unity meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, are focusing attention on this critical subject.

The survey offers two basic reasons for the tendency to underrate Africa's strategic significance:

- Africa is weak in terms of trained manpower and advanced equipment.

### Importance 'Disputable'

- The African continent "is so situated in relation to the main centers of power in the world today that in the event of a global conflict it might have little political significance."

The ISS study finds, however, that even an estimate of African significance is "disputable." As the nature of East-West tension modifies, "the centers of interest tend to shift and inevitably to include any areas of instability."

"Africa certainly contains some of these," declares W. F.

Gutteridge, who with Neville Brown prepared "The African Military Balance." Mr. Gutteridge is the author of "Armed Forces in New States." Mr. Brown is an ISS research associate.

The survey estimates that the forces of African states number about 395,000 men. Of this total, approximately 250,000 are said to be serving in the countries of the Mediterranean littoral. Of the remaining 145,000 in sub-Saharan Africa, the Congo (Leopoldville) and Ethiopia contribute almost one-half.

Ethiopia's forces are rated by Mr. Gutteridge as "the most effective in the area" but also the least likely to be deployed on some foreign military venture.

### Armed Forces Vary

"Those of the Congo still suffer from the legacy of the mutinous Force Publique and are faced with civil war at home," reports Mr. Gutteridge.

"By contrast, the Republic of South Africa has a cadre-type defense force, the nucleus of a citizen army which could amount in a short emergency to a quarter of a million fairly

well-trained white men backed by the most modern as well as the most experienced air force on the continent."

Turning to emergent Africa, Mr. Gutteridge continues:

"Not only is the military strength of the new African states minimal: they have not the ability to deploy it far from home. . . . With foreign aid they could and do train guerrillas and saboteurs for action against 'the last outposts of colonialism,' but they are handicapped in their desire to achieve more than this by the lack of an infrastructure of technological education and by their essential poverty."

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